

Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio educators call for eradication strategy to fight the pandemic

**Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee
17 September 2021**

The Pennsylvania Educators Rank-and-File Safety Committee, attended by educators in Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio, passed the following resolution at our meeting last Thursday calling for the immediate implementation of a strategy to eradicate the pandemic. All educators, parents and students in the region who wish to join our committee to fight for this should sign up today to get involved.

Less than a month after in-person learning has begun in Pennsylvania, Maryland and Ohio, COVID-19 cases have surged among educators, children and their communities. In all three states, new cases are several times higher than they were a year ago, and in Ohio they are approaching the peaks seen during the winter surge. Many school districts have been forced to close schools because of the severity of the outbreaks, yet merely plan to reopen in a few days.

Pennsylvania's Democratic Governor Tom Wolf and his Republican counterparts in Maryland and Ohio have pushed the reopening of schools without any concern for the safety of educators, students or the community. They are driven only by the desire to get children in the classroom and parents back to work. The National Education Association (NEA) and the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), as well as their state and local affiliates, have also pushed this reopening policy.

We, the educators of Maryland, Pennsylvania and Ohio, demand the immediate implementation of a strategy to eradicate COVID-19, which requires the halting of all in-person instruction along with the strongest public health measures necessary to end this deadly pandemic.

Upon returning to the classrooms, we find our buildings in terrible shape and even basic precautions

are no longer being taken. We cannot express our level of anger and frustration over the lack of even the most elementary safety measures for ourselves, our students and our community.

We are horrified to learn of our colleagues and students who are becoming infected and dying. In the Miami School District, 15 educators and staff died in the first 10 days after they reopened. Fifteen lives lost for no reason but to satisfy the whims of the wealthy to have children back in school so parents can be back at work. Scores of other educators, staff, bus drivers and now children are dying in other districts throughout the country. In every area of the country where schools have reopened, case counts, hospitalizations and deaths are on the rise.

Even the meager and inadequate actions taken last year have disappeared.

Gone are social distancing, remote instruction plans, and in some cases masks. Even the COVID-19 dashboards are gone. Parents, educators and staff are left in the dark as the pandemic grows and spreads. Would you operate a car or airplane if the instruments on the dashboard weren't working? What has happened to a parent's right to know about outbreaks at their children's schools?

Most reporting is left to the students and staff themselves. We are expected to self-report cases at the same time that COVID-19 leave has been stripped away, incentivizing underpaid educators to not get tested and stay on the job. In some cases, teachers are being told to come in for work even with a positive test result as long as they are masked and not showing symptoms.

In most of our schools, testing and contact tracing are

not being done at all. No one knows how bad outbreaks truly are with only the worst cases recorded. Under-reporting is rampant, and administrators often do not count student infections, claiming that the students were infected in the community rather than in school.

Under such circumstances, it is disgraceful that our schools are in such decrepit order. Many of our buildings are 100 years old or older, filled with levels of asbestos and lead that made them unsafe before the pandemic. Ventilation, which was promised to be improved by the Biden administration, does not exist or is woefully inadequate. Some teachers cannot even open their classroom windows.

The Biden administration and state and local politicians, along with our unions, claim that schools can be safe with mitigation methods such as vaccines and mask wearing. In reality, these measures are not being done. Even if they were fully implemented, the science is clear that this will only slow down, but not stop the pandemic. The Delta variant is too transmissible to be controlled with mitigation methods.

The entire summer, when cases could have been brought totally under control, was instead wasted. Equipment, training, and resources could have been provided to students and teachers and preparations made for an easy and quality transition to remote learning. Instead, schools got rid of virtual options or denied parents the opportunity to switch later in the year. Every step of the way, virtual education has been sabotaged, leaving teachers with double the work and vulnerable students to fall off the grid.

What has happened to the millions in relief money provided to the districts? Where was it spent?

At meetings with administrators we are told, “COVID is scary, and people will die, but suck it up and deal with it” and “you have to have blinders on when it comes to COVID fears.” Our first and foremost duty is to look out for the welfare of our students, and we will not be silenced in the face of this disaster.

The politicians and union officials say that in-person learning is essential for children to have the “social experience” of the classroom. As educators, we know better than anyone the needs of our students for social connections. However, under the circumstances of a raging pandemic, it is not in a student’s best interest to be exposed or expose others to a virus which can kill or seriously sicken themselves, their friends or their

families.

Our committee calls for the implementation of a strategy to eliminate COVID-19 as the only way to halt this disastrous pandemic. In addition to the shutdown of all in-person learning and other non-essential services, this entails a mass vaccination campaign, universal testing and contact tracing, the safe isolation of all infected patients, and all other public health measures necessary to stop the spread of the virus.

We are well aware of the hardship that shutting down schools and other non-essential services will have on the families we serve. We therefore demand that full income protection be provided to all workers who must stay home during lockdowns, along with rent/mortgage and utilities subsidies.

We have a right to health and to our lives. We are expanding our rank-and-file committee in concert with committees throughout the region and the US, and call upon educators, staff, bus drivers, parents and students to join our committee and take up this fight.



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